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ARCTIC OPERATIONS: DON'T FORGET CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

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ABSTRACT

The rush for Arctic natural resources and their economic benefits, combined with disputed claims to territory in the region, has driven some “Arctic” nations to begin establishing a more robust military presence in the area. As the U.S. military increases such operations to keep the Arctic safe from internal and external threats, cultural intelligence cannot be forgotten. The paper will argue that in order to ensure U.S. success in future Arctic operations, the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) Commander must establish Arctic cultural intelligence as an integral part of the planning process. It will define what cultural intelligence is and why it is an important operational consideration. It will also explain why having cultural intelligence is specifically needed in the Arctic as a planning consideration. Finally, this paper will explore avenues the NORTHCOM Commander can use to gain cultural intelligence on the Arctic indigenous people.

INTRODUCTION

We seek an Arctic Region that is stable and free of conflict, where nations act responsibly in a spirit of trust and cooperation, and where economic and energy sources are developed in a sustainable manner that also respects the fragile environment and the interests and cultures of the indigenous people.

– U.S. National Strategy for the Arctic

Once seen as remote and almost inaccessible, the Arctic region has captured the attention of the world in the last several decades. Much of this attention is due to record levels of annual ice reduction, offering countries and commercial enterprises around the world, the promise of enormous economic gain through the exploitation of the natural resources believed to be so abundant in the region. Changing Arctic conditions may also enhance commercial shipping by shortening global trade routes—a centuries old dream. While the public statements of all nations involved in the region are ones of cooperation, the Arctic has the potential to produce conflict. A further consideration for any type of activity in the Arctic is the need to comprehend the complexity of the region, including the varying legal, political, economic and sociological factors that define it. From a U.S. military perspective, the Arctic is an operating area of 40 million square kilometers¹, 4 million people², 8 nations³, 40 languages⁴, and varied religious and spiritual activities, coupled with enormous economic and technological diversity.

The rush for Arctic natural resources and their economic benefits, combined with disputed claims to territory in the region, has driven some “Arctic” nations to begin establishing a more robust military presence in the area. Even though there has long been a military presence in the Arctic, the scope of operations has been limited. As the U.S. military increases such operations to keep the Arctic safe from internal and external threats, there is one aspect that cannot be forgotten--cultural awareness. As noted above, it should not be

overlooked that approximately four million people live in the Arctic region, with four hundred thousand being indigenous to the area.⁵ Just like tribes encountered in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Arctic indigenous people see the Arctic as their land and all newcomers to the region as foreigners on their soil.

The U.S. National Strategy and Arctic Strategy clearly state that the U.S. will take account of the indigenous communities and show respect for the interests and the culture of the Arctic's indigenous people when planning U.S. military operations.^{6, 7} To compliment national strategy, the Department of Defense (DOD) also has policies on how to consult and interact with Alaskan Natives.⁸ However, with respect to the Arctic multi-national operations, the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) Commander will need to look beyond relations with Alaskan indigenous people and develop cultural awareness of all Arctic nations' indigenous people.

To ensure U.S. success in future Arctic operations, the NORTHCOM Commander must establish Arctic cultural intelligence as an integral part of the planning process. In order for the NORTHCOM Commander to fully comprehend the need for cultural intelligence in the Arctic region, he will require comprehensive knowledge of the following: First, what cultural intelligence is, why it is important, and how it affects military operations. Second, why cultural intelligence is needed specifically in the Arctic region, and finally, where to gain cultural intelligence on the Arctic indigenous population.

THE “WHAT” AND “WHY” OF CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

After his time in Somalia, General Zinni former U.S. Central Command Commander, had a clear understanding that cultural intelligence is one of the most important tools to level the playing field when operating in areas where the culture is the U.S. polar opposite (1992).⁹

According to General Zinni, the lessons learned after Somalia were that he needed to know the culture, the issues, who the decision makers were, and how the people of Somalia think.¹⁰ Similarly, in the Arctic, to appreciate the need for cultural intelligence, the commander must have a complete understanding of what cultural intelligence is and why it is critical to military operations. To logically establish the “what” and “why” of cultural intelligence, it is paramount to know the definition, why it matters, and how it affects military operations.

Cultural intelligence can be defined as analyzed social, political, economic, and other demographic information that provides understanding of a people or nation’s history, institutions, psychology, beliefs, and behaviors.¹¹ All of the attributes tied to the definition are areas that the commander must be tuned into if they are really going to know the culture of the people in their region or to be able to truly respect them. The classic military strategist Sun Tzu said, “know your enemy”; conversely understanding your allies and people requiring protection, makes cultural intelligence matter.

The U.S. military engages in operations around the world, and whether kinetic, or in the realm of humanitarian assistance and disaster response, they will inevitably involve cultures that are not the same as our own. A good example is the humanitarian mission in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. One of the reasons the Army was able to be so effective in Haiti was due to a very culturally conscious operational commander. The Army recognized that the people were the center of gravity in Haiti and protecting them was the top priority. When U.S. forces arrived, leaders and troops alike began to interact with the Haitians to gain an understanding of their culture. One way they did this was to use “Creole” speaking soldiers to engage with the locals and offer help to them.¹² Joint Task Force-Haiti (JTF-H) operations can be considered a huge success mostly because the operations never lost sight of

the objective of taking care of the people in need. The troops on the ground immersed themselves within the people, learned about them, and developed a rapport, which built an umbrella of trust. JTF-H obviously knew the importance of cultural intelligence and executed this mission seamlessly. The U.S. Army considers its approach to be a model the military should follow in other humanitarian missions.¹³

The U.S. military has not always been culturally astute, and therefore suffered the consequences during operations. Operation Restore Hope in Somalia (1992) was a military humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping mission that went horribly wrong for a multitude of reasons, but a lack of cultural intelligence played a significant role in that failure. In Somalia, the U.N. Forces did not take into account the culture of the clans and how they would bind together against outsiders. The cultural mantra of the clans was “me and my clan against the outsiders.”¹⁴ If the U.N. troops would have known that the Somalis viewed the world this way, then things might have turned out differently. The lack of cultural intelligence of the Somali people was one of the major causes of failure in this peacekeeping operation and subsequently became the catalyst for the promotion of cultural intelligence by General Zinni and others.¹⁵

Clearly, cultural intelligence is indispensable, and the historical examples provided illustrate that point. However, just as climates are different around the globe, so too are cultures, and because of those differences, the importance of cultural intelligence may fluctuate depending on the operating area.

WHY CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE ARCTIC

The Arctic is currently in the spotlight and many nations see it as a place where the race has started for natural resources.¹⁶ However, looking beyond the financial aspects of the

Arctic, there is a multi-nation indigenous population there, which sees the Arctic as their rightful home. These native people may be nervous about the outcome of this newfound interest in their backyard, which includes a military presence to which they are not accustomed. This begs a question: Why is cultural intelligence in the Arctic important for the NORTHCOM Commander to consider? Answer: because it is a new operating space that needs to be shaped and molded, taking into account the vast diversity of the population, the need for their sustainment, and mutual security cooperation.

Regardless of how the U.S. views the Arctic, at the operational level Arctic cultural awareness will be a crucial requirement for how operations are planned and executed. Expectations that operations in the Arctic will be kinetic are very low, but the likelihood of operations aligned with humanitarian and disaster response will be very high. The bottom line is that it is an area in which the military must have a presence, and as in any new area of operations, there are requirements that have to be met to achieve operational objectives. One objective of which is to operate effectively within the human terrain. Cultural intelligence will play a major part in influencing the Arctic area of interest, mainly because of the diversity of the indigenous people living and established in the area.

The diversity of the indigenous people across all the Arctic countries is an important consideration. For example, in the Alaskan Arctic region, about 70% of the population is indigenous, with 11 distinct cultures, some 22 different dialects, and many other cultural differences inherent to specific tribes.¹⁷ Additionally, as the U.S. military begins to operate in a multi-national role in the Arctic regions, the NORTHCOM Commander will have to plan for forces to be engaging and communicating with the Arctic indigenous people within other Arctic Rim countries (Canada, Russia, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden and Finland). If

this is not addressed during planning, the potential is there to offend a nation and their indigenous people without knowing it. Furthermore, in the case of Alaskan Natives, it has to be remembered that tribes hold certain sovereign rights that should be respected.¹⁸

While the indigenous people from these areas are all linked in heritage, there are distinct cultural differences as well. Russia alone has 41 different indigenous groups living in its Arctic region.¹⁹ In the Arctic region there are also over 40 different languages amongst the indigenous people.²⁰ To put the language difference into perspective, in Afghanistan with almost 32 million people, 96% of the population speaks only three major different languages.²¹ This depth of diversity in the Arctic can create real challenges. Therefore, it will be up to the commander to work at not alienating a population, but finding ways to promote a mutually supportive association with the indigenous people.

Utilizing cultural intelligence, and becoming culturally competent in the Arctic territory can facilitate a cooperative relationship with the indigenous people that may yield great benefit. For example, with the region's expected increase in maritime traffic, security will be a growing factor on military leadership's and law enforcement's minds. This is the perfect opportunity for the NORTHCOM Commander to seek a theater security cooperation agreement with other Arctic countries and the indigenous people of the Arctic. The U.S. could look to benchmark what Canada is already doing to increase protection of the region. Canada realized it did not have the capacity to secure its Arctic borders without the help of the indigenous people, and employed them to take an active role in national security.²² This model has some secondary and tertiary effects: It drives the Canadian Forces to work with the indigenous people, acquiring some of their vital knowledge of the region in order to operate in it more efficiently. Additionally, according to Olin Strader and Alison Weisburger

of the Arctic Institute, if a model like this can be agreed upon throughout all the Arctic nations, it could bring all the indigenous people together under a mutual bond through security cooperation.²³ However, this type of cooperation can only happen if the commander knows the culture of the people, and trust exists between them.

The Arctic indigenous people see changes happening to their homeland and they are concerned about their livelihood and how they are going to sustain themselves over time.²⁴ These concerns are not primarily a military issue, but could quickly become a concern if something was to happen to create instability among the indigenous people in any Arctic country. For instance, melting ice is already driving the indigenous people from their coastal homes.²⁵ Likewise, imagine an oil spill from a wrecked tanker that impacts the sea life, and reduces the only food supply for an indigenous tribe and harms the environment, which for them is not only economic and aesthetic, but also sacred. If a tragedy like this occurred, from the indigenous' viewpoint, the destruction and desecration of sacred space, compounded with the loss of fish and animal life would be almost unforgivable. This stems from a spiritual belief that fish and other creatures are believed to have a spirit or soul *in addition* to an environmental and economic value.²⁶ A commander attempting to carry out operations in the region would certainly recognize the environmental and economic consequences, but might not necessarily anticipate the religious/spiritual consequences. A case in point was in Operation Provide Comfort (1991), in which Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) containing pork were dropped to the starving Muslim Kurdish, who then accused the military commanders of ignoring and disrespecting religious values even though the situation was *in extremis*.²⁷ The main areas where the indigenous people live are sparse, and the infrastructure is weak, so a catastrophic event could easily create a refugee crisis. If this scenario materialized, an Arctic

commander could quickly find themselves immersed in taking care of a people in need, just as the military did after Desert Storm with the Kurdish refugees. Sound cultural intelligence planning would enhance the decision making process in a situation like this in the Arctic, and allow the commander to take advantage of the trust that has been built, to help bring stability to a fragile region. That trust would entice the indigenous people to see the military as part of the solution, rather than part of the problem.

Some would argue that greater cultural intelligence is unnecessary in the Arctic. The indigenous people in the Arctic are not an enemy, and the U.S. should only be concerned with U.S. interests, not the interest of non-threatening communities. Beyond this, we can't really know what operations in the Arctic are going to look like in the future, so there is no need to consider how operations will affect the indigenous people of the region.

However, the fact that the Arctic people are not the enemy makes it even more important to have in-depth knowledge about their culture. Consider the indigenous people of the Alaskan Arctic area. They have a different culture than the mainstream American, but nonetheless they are Americans, and the operational commander has an obligation to consider them in his plans. Not doing so would be comparable to planning a military exercise on the mainland U.S. and failing to take into account the safety of the population and how the locals would react to a military presence. It may be something as unassuming as the noise levels that come from the fighter aircraft the U.S. Air Force will be flying in the region. Noise at that level may scare animals away, which will severely affect a population that relies on subsistence hunting.²⁸ Additionally, if the U.S. is conducting a multi-national exercise with another Arctic country, there is a need to consider how the exercise may negatively affect the indigenous population of the host country during the planning phase. In such cases,

the U.S. should tailor the exercise to meet the ethical and moral standards of how the U.S. would treat its own native people. In the Arctic, the land is the life-blood of the population, and if seen to be treating it disrespectfully, an ally could be turned into an enemy over time. The NORTHCOM Commander will have to balance the requirements to protect U.S. national interests against those of the Arctic population, while maintaining their trust. Nevertheless, if negative cultural impacts are not addressed early, the operational commander will be stifled by the political power of the indigenous tribes, and needed operations could come to a halt. Recently, the indigenous people in Alaska sued Shell Oil because of the environmental damage being done by exploratory drilling.²⁹ In the military realm, this scenario has the potential to be the indigenous population blocking port facilities or bases that may be built in the future. This could easily be a limiting factor the commander is faced with in the Arctic, and could be avoided if handled in a deliberate manner while planning military operations. In order to circumvent these issues, one must embrace cultural intelligence so the indigenous people of the Arctic do not become disgruntled, and U.S. Arctic operations remain successful.

It is true that nobody can fully know what the Arctic environment is going to look like in the future and what that will mean for military operations. However, most experts would agree that the area is changing enough that increased maritime traffic will be a reality. According to the U.S. Coast Guard's (USCG) Arctic Strategy, from 2008 to 2012 there was a 118 percent increase in Arctic maritime transit.³⁰ Moreover, Russia is building up its military in the region and looking to stand up an Arctic Command by the end of 2014.³¹ The recent provocative actions of Russia will surely increase the presence of the U.S. military and allied partners in the region. These military forces will be operating in an area sparsely populated

and dominated by an indigenous group of natives, which makes cultural intelligence an operational imperative that cannot be forgotten in the planning process.

The need for cultural intelligence in the Arctic is evident. However, the way to gain it may not be. How does an Arctic operational commander obtain this vital understanding to increase his odds of operational success?

GAINING CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE ARCTIC

In September 2011, the Naval War College Arctic Fleet Operations war game discovered that “Navy personnel lacked local culture and tribal awareness of the populace inhabiting the Arctic.”³² Findings like these, confirm that the NORTHCOM commander will need to fully appreciate and actively pursue avenues of new inquiry to understand the indigenous people who have lived on the lands for thousands of years. In the early stages of planning, it will suffice to gain cultural intelligence by automated research to know the basic facts of the indigenous population. However, if one wants to truly be culturally competent in the region, and implement the information gained in the planning process, they will have to seek outside help. The commander will need to actively engage in tribal political and social deliberations, leverage interagency partners, and work with allied military partners in the region, who may be well versed in the ways of the Arctic indigenous people.

In a similar way to the people of Afghanistan, the tribe to which they belong categorizes the Arctic indigenous people. In Alaska alone, there are 229 federally recognized tribes that have to be considered when maneuvering in Alaska.³³ Taking lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan, tribal engagements are essential when operating in a region where the lands are officially (and unofficially) ruled and governed by tribal leaders. Furthermore, it is federally mandated that tribes be consulted if any issue will affect their rights, resources or

interests.³⁴ Currently, Joint Task Force-Alaska abides by this federal mandate and also actively engages the tribal communities in the Alaskan region of the Arctic.³⁵ However, thinking beyond Alaska, the NORTHCOM Commander should seek to use the Arctic Council, which was formed in 1996 as a forum for all the Arctic states to come together to discuss issues affecting the region.³⁶ Currently, there are six permanent participant groups to the Arctic Council that represent the indigenous people of the Arctic.³⁷ Using this forum would not be a traditional tribal engagement, but it would provide the platform for the NORTHCOM Commander to get insight into all the indigenous people across all the Arctic Nations.

Tribal engagements are, and will continue to be, the commander's greatest tool in building a relationship and trust with the indigenous people. The indigenous population is already suspicious of the military increasing operations in their back yard, so tribal engagements on an international level will be of paramount importance. One can look back to 1953 when the trust was broken between the indigenous people of Greenland and the U.S. military. During this time the indigenous people were expelled from their homeland, so Thule Air Base could be established.³⁸ Thule Air Base is still operating today, and the native people may predictably continue to harbor animosity at having to leave lands that were rightfully theirs. Additionally, as the U.S. continues to establish ballistic missile defense in the Arctic (Greenland) the local indigenous people are anxious at what the negative impacts may be to their community.³⁹ The commander should look to past examples like this as Arctic operations increase, and not let history repeat itself.

Tribal engagements are just one tool to gain cultural intelligence. While the Arctic will be a relatively new operating area for the military, interagency partners like the

Department of State (DOS) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have been in the area for a long time and have a wealth of knowledge of the indigenous people. Today, interagency coordination is a must in the operational planning process. This is specifically true for the intelligence environment, where intelligence sharing is a must, and most definitely a force multiplier for the commander. Joint Publication 2-01 (Joint and National Intelligence Support to Military Operations) emphasizes this point. It states, “DOD intelligence organizations should expect to operate alongside federal, state, local, and tribal elements in security or disaster relief/incident response events.”⁴⁰ While doctrine does not specifically call out cultural intelligence as a core competency for the intelligence community, cultural intelligence can be treated in the same interagency fashion that Joint Publication 2-01 identifies. For example, the DOS is a valuable resource to use to gain cultural intelligence in the Arctic. The U.S. has been an Arctic nation since it purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867 and the DOS has been an integral part of making sure national policy and strategy match in the region from the beginning.⁴¹ Additionally, the DOS is the U.S. representative to the Arctic Council. The DOS as part of the council is an enormous resource to leverage in gaining cultural intelligence based on the relationships they have already fostered. The DOS has been a member of the council from its inception and works closely with the permanent participants that represent the Arctic indigenous people. The DOS has built trust, which will help the U.S. be fruitful in Arctic endeavors.

Furthermore, the DOS is not the only agency that is familiar with the Arctic and the indigenous people. DHS through the United States Coast Guard (USCG) is probably the agency with the most familiarity in the region. The USCG is no stranger to the Arctic, and has an extensive record of maritime operations there with broad partnerships spanning almost

150 years in the region.⁴² Additionally, the USCG is an impressive cultural intelligence resource in the Arctic. The USCG (Detachment 17) in Alaska has a department dedicated to cultural intelligence and liaising with the indigenous tribes. The NORTHCOM Commander can leverage this educated resource to know exactly what the indigenous people are about, and what their concerns and grievances may be.

Lastly, the NORTHCOM Commander can gain cultural intelligence by looking at what their allied military partners are doing in the region. One regional partner to look to is Russia. Lately, relations with Russia have been tense, but the fact remains that more than half of the Arctic indigenous people live on the Russian side of the Arctic.⁴³ From the NORTHCOM Commander's perspective, Russia may be the Arctic state making the greatest strides in building up military infrastructure in the region. Due to the size of this buildup, the indigenous people will be affected in some shape or form, so in theory there could be relevant lessons learned from Russian military expansion. The U.S. could also look to its neighbor, Canada, and see what they are doing regarding cultural intelligence. The Canadian Forces actually have military programs that are specific to the aboriginal people in Canada, including the Canadian Force Aboriginal Entry Program. This is a three-week program for aboriginal people thinking of joining the military that show them what military life would be like with no commitment to join and also pays them \$1,200.⁴⁴ This type of program with the indigenous people can produce mutual understanding and help build a lasting civil-military relationship.

Skeptics may balk at the need for the commander to gain cultural intelligence on the Arctic indigenous people. It could be argued that the commander does not have a need, especially since DOS, DHS, and other agencies and groups have already done the preparation

and have a deeper understanding of the indigenous populations. Nonetheless, change in the Arctic is creating an instability factor that the region has never seen before. With instability comes security risks, and the commander will need to utilize every possible data point available to keep U.S. interests and the interests of the people secure.

To be effective, commanders must engage within a joint environment, in concert with many different entities, agencies and multi-national partners. When it comes to intelligence, the definitive way to success is through a shared approach. The NORTHCOM Commander must realize the importance of cultural intelligence and most of all where to get it. He need only look at past operations, and lessons learned to know where to acquire this intelligence. Those operations would have potentially failed if the commander did not try to understand the people by engaging with tribal leaders, leveraging interagency partnerships, and working with allied military partners with vast knowledge of the region.

CONCLUSION

The importance of cultural intelligence in enhancing a commander's awareness and potential of success is far from a new concept. However, by looking at past operations in Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan, it is apparent that it is sometimes forgotten, or not given the attention it deserves. At the operational level, the Arctic can be considered to be in "Phase Zero," and it is continuously being shaped for future operations. In this phase it is imperative that cultural intelligence not be overlooked. The information gained during this time will give the commander the cultural competence they will need to operate effectively.

If cultural intelligence is not considered in the operational planning process, it will lead the Arctic indigenous people to believe the U.S. military does not respect or care about their culture, and potentially jeopardize forthcoming operations. The simple fact is the

indigenous populations are going to be the ones most negatively affected by increased military operations, and the NORTHCOM Commander must strive to avoid alienating the indigenous population. Whether the DOD is ready or not, it is likely that the DOD will be involved in the process to help these citizens maintain the life to which they are accustomed. As the ice recedes, the indigenous people are fearful of the instability it will bring to their homeland and the struggles they will face for survival. While the DOD cannot change the ice melting, it can take into account the culture of the area, and ensure that military operations in this region are helping shape the environment by being respectful of the culture as operations commence. The NORTHCOM Commander's ability to appreciate cultural intelligence and how it specifically relates to the Arctic will ensure U.S. success in future Arctic operations. In order to secure this success the NORTHCOM Commander has to institute Arctic cultural intelligence as a fundamental part of the planning process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cultural intelligence must be an operational priority. In order for this to take place, a few things must happen. First, the NORTHCOM Commander should establish a civil affairs (CA) function for Arctic operations. In Joint Publication 3-57, CA is specifically established to be the tool to conduct assessments on how populations and cultures will affect military operations and how military operations will affect populations and cultures.⁴⁵ This is the medium needed in the Arctic to help learn about the indigenous people and provide needed assistance. NORTHCOM should establish CA Teams to partner in the North American Arctic region with Interagency, Non-Governmental Organizations, and Inter-Governmental Organizations. A lot of the areas where the indigenous people live are poverty stricken. As military operations increase and bring different levels of disruption to a local population,

having these teams will help to build trust and rapport with a population in need. In the end, if the NORTHCOM Commander does not have in-depth cultural awareness of the entire Arctic indigenous people, he is assuming the risk of isolating a population, which will likely have unintended consequences in Arctic operations.

Second, the DOD should leverage the U.S. taking over the chairmanship of the Arctic Council, and establish a military and indigenous issues working group. In 2015, the U.S. will take over the chairmanship from Canada. This transition presents an opportunity for the DOD to push for the establishment of a working group between military leaders of the Arctic Nations (i.e. NORTHCOM Commander) and the leaders of the indigenous groups represented at the council. When the Arctic Council was established, one charge was for Arctic states to use the forum to establish cooperation between the states and also the indigenous people.⁴⁶ A working group could be the medium to discuss certain military actions that are taking place now or in the future, and how they will affect the indigenous populations. A group of this nature would also be a transparent way for Arctic nation militaries to share lessons learned, to potentially avoid negative impacts to the indigenous populations. The overall goal of this working group would be to build lasting relationships, so future operations can be planned appropriately to produce prosperous outcomes.

NOTES

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² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

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¹⁰ Ibid

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¹³ Ibid, 89.

¹⁴ Michael Marra, and William Pierce, "Somalia 20 Years Later-Lessons Learned, Re-Learned and Forgotten," *Small Wars Journal*, September 11, 2013, accessed 10 April 2014, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/somalia-20-years-later---lessons-learned-re-learned-and-forgotten>.

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